



"Yes, operator, I'll hold"

The Church: 1970

The Clergy In Politics

By Fr. Andrew Greeley



Whether any of the clergymen, Catholic or Protestant, currently seeking positions in the United States Congress are going to be elected is in doubt. But their attempt to succeed to public office raises some interesting observations. Catholic voters have a long tradition of resenting their clergies becoming involved in politics.

The feeling that the clergy should stay out of elective politics may be theologically unsound (though even here I am not persuaded), but it's firmly rooted in the consciousness of American Catholicism; and, unless I am mistaken, will remain so rooted for a long time to come.

Some of those who are seeking public office may argue that, unlike the European clergy, who meddled in politics, they are running on left-wing rather than right-wing platforms. One is not altogether sure what difference it makes. A clergyman is necessarily identified by the public with his Church.

In Rhode Island, for example, the U.S. senatorial candidate who suddenly discovered he had a priest running against him phoned the local chancery office to inquire what he had done wrong that the Church would put up a candidate against him. One wonders if he was persuaded of what was obviously the truth: the Church was not running a candidate against him. One further wonders whether the electorate could be persuaded.

In the popular mind a priest turned politician cannot divorce himself from the Church. The Church will be praised by those who like what he does, condemned by those who do not like it, and ultimately blamed when the public grows tired of him as the public is inclined to do with most politicians — save those who are political geniuses and, one rather suspects, most priests-turned-politicians will, not be that.

But a question remains: Why have the American Catholic clergy suddenly succumbed to a temptation which has been powerful enough for Protestant clergy all along, but which generally has not been a serious problem for Catholic clergy? Why have priest-politicians sprung up apparently all over the land — or at least all over the eastern seaboard? Part of the reason, I suspect, is the current clerical identity crisis. If you are not sure of what a clergyman is any more, then you've got to find something else to do.

You might become a psychotherapist or revolutionary or leader of an anti-pollution crusade or, in absence of anything

better, a politician. The situation is somewhat analogous to that of the college professor. The professor is no longer sure who he is or what he ought to be doing. He is quite conscious (at least if he is honest) that he has rather notably failed in his assigned task of instructing the young and so he looks for something else to do; and, like the priest in his identity crisis, he gravitates to politics as lemmings do towards the sea.

The second explanation is that ours is unquestionably a time of trouble and confusion in American society. It is also a time of great moral outrage. It is evident that there are a number of things seriously wrong, such as war and racial injustice. These issues involve terribly important moral judgments. The clergyman surveys the scene and says to himself, "Who is better qualified to straighten them out than I?"

The only honest answer is, "practically anyone."

The principal problem with the priest-politician is that the qualities required traditionally in the clergyman and the qualities required traditionally in the politician are rather difficult to harmonize.

The clergyman is expected to stand for clarity of moral principle; the politician for the compromise necessary to form viable political coalitions. The clergyman is expected to represent clear and unambiguous values; the politician is required to be alert to the complexity and the grayness of political reality. The clergyman is held to lead by exhorting and challenging others to their maximum commitment; the politician must listen very carefully to his soundings at the grass roots and must deal not so much with the maximum possible generosity of his constituents but rather with the minimum feasible generosity.

Neither role is intrinsically superior to the other; both are required. An occasional rare man can combine the two (and at least one of the priest candidates whom I know personally comes closer to combining the two than most other men). A little more awareness of the complexities of political and social reality would benefit many clergymen, and a little more emotional and moral enthusiasm would certainly benefit most politicians. Yet what this Republic of ours does not need at the present time is more moralism and self-righteousness among political leaders. It is to be very much feared that it is precisely these qualities that the cleric turned politician is most likely to bring to public life.

On The Right Side

A Military Parish

By Father Paul J. Cuddy



In 1956 the Air Force assigned me as base chaplain of Nouasseur Air Depot 18 miles from Casablanca. Our chapel staff consisted of two Protestant chaplains and myself; three fine A.F. assistants in their early twenties: one Protestant, one Catholic, and the fabulous Izzie who returned home after his tour of duty and entered a Jewish seminary in New York to become a rabbi. We had two civilian secretaries, young Mlle. Louise Bastanti, French and magnanimous, and Mme. Rita von Domhidly, Dutch from Indonesia, a soothing mid-thirty linguist who spoke four languages well. And there was Boshalb, a Berber, who kept the place clean. His constant smile became wan toward the end of the Muslim Ramadan fast. Our department was efficient and happy, and the chapel became a kind of USO where men were at home.

A military base which has some stability, i.e., not on the move as in time of conflict, is much like a civilian parish.

We had the scheduled religious services, which for Catholics would be the Mass, Lenten devotions, First Fridays. There was never any trouble getting altar boys; our men considered serving Mass a privilege.

There was a small side chapel for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. The depot had about 400 youngsters in the American School, of whom a third were Catholics. So we had a good CCD program, with the military men and wives as teachers.

The annual Mission was given by a handsome Redemptorist who preached like a polished Jesuit, and a white haired Jesuit who preached like a Southern Baptist Evangelist. Both were effective. Both were kind confessors.

Our men and women (nurses, USO and Red Cross workers, WAF, civilian workers, teachers, wives of the Air Force personnel and the adjoining Corps of Engineers) were a cross section of Ecclesia Americana. In the life on a military base, the virtues in many strengthen, and the weaknesses in others develop. I have never seen such great goodness nor such miserable baseness, as in the military service. The military "separates the men from the boys" even in religion.

Our Holy Name Society included an Adult Study Group. The teen-age activities were sensibly centered around the

American school, but the traditional First Communion and Confirmation celebrations were centered around the chapel program.

The women's group, St. Anne's Society, met each month. They discussed some religious topic, a book review, the CCD program. Usually some charity for the indigenous poor was promoted. An annual retreat for the women was held. The meetings always concluded with cake, coffee and chatter.

In our St. Anne's Society was Marjorie Snow. She was a gifted statistician with the Corps of Engineers, remarkable for a gracious femininity combined with a hair-tossed spirit for adventure. And she loved and lived the Faith.

She always regarded me well, a regard which I have enthusiastically encouraged her to continue. I have not seen her since 1957, but she writes three times a year. After Morocco, she wrote from India; then from Wheelis A.F. Base in Tunisia. The last few years she has written from Vietnam.

On Sept. 10, 1970 she wrote a surprising letter which will be of interest to many in next week's column.

On the Line

The POW Tragedy

By Bob Considine



Of all the sad words that have been spoken in the hallowed halls of Congress can any surpass those of astronaut Frank Borman?

After a 25-nation tour in behalf of enlisting world support for the plight of American servicemen being held by the North Vietnamese, the commander of the first manned vessel to fly around the moon recalled that in an earlier appearance before the Congress he had been able to report on "an American success and human triumph."

But now, he added, speaking of the utter failure of his earthly mission, "I can only report American anguish and human tragedy."

It was sadly noted by the wives or widows of the POWs present in the galleries that the House of Representatives was less than half filled. To some of them, this confirmed their belief that the government is callously indifferent to the woes of the families of men captured or "missing."

Borman urged that the U.S. mobilize "world opinion" against the North Vietnamese captors who treat the prisoners — number unknown — as war criminals rather than captives entitled to the amenities guaranteed by the Geneva Convention, to which Hanoi is a signatory. The poor wives or widows applauded, as if "world opinion" had as much impact in this day and age as the lower half of the batting order of the Washington Senators ballclub. The dear ladies who have been under terrible stress for, in some cases, as many as six

years, also applauded when the astronaut said he would rather depend on the UN to do something about the prisoners than on the anti-war "peace missions," which have been used by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong for propaganda purposes.

The distressing fault with this noble position is that the UN as an entity has never associated itself with the war in Vietnam as it did in Korea. It does not want to become involved in any way. And, whether "used" or not, the peace groups have sprung more information and letters from the prisoners than the combined efforts of the U.S., our allies, the International Red Cross, the Vatican and the intercession of such neutrals as Switzerland and India. Any concerned family would hungrily accept word from a loved one even if the message was accompanied by a blatant lecture to the effect that the beloved should not have gone to Vietnam in the first place.

Borman was as good a special-pleader as we could have sent on this mission. His failure is not to be charged against him. It must be deposited on the doorstep of a peculiar period in the history of man and his morality. The U.S. has the muscle to wipe North Vietnam off the map, and kill all the Russians and Red Chinese several times over if those two intervened. But in the process, we would kill the very Americans we're trying to save from miserable imprisonment. As for "world opinion," if any of the captors ever heard of it they probably think it is a news weekly.

What is there to do except sweat?

And, of course, pray.

As the war in Indochina subsides, it escalates at home. Latest figures from the FBI — based on voluntary reports from law enforcement agencies throughout the U.S.—show violent crimes up 10 per cent, crimes against property up 12 per cent, armed robbery, 19 per cent.

A word of caution goes with these periodic assessments of domestic violence. For reasons best known to the enforcement agencies involved, figures voluntarily submitted to the FBI do not always represent a true picture of the degradation. A city looking for tourists or new industry does not wish the nation to know that it has more crime than a rival city. A police commissioner is reluctant to confess that he and his men cannot or will not handle the surging local crime wave better than the commissioner in the next town.

So one can only conclude that the latest figures, deplorable as they are, are actually on the optimistic side of the truth. New York City reported that from January to June, 1970, it was the scene of 530 murders, 1,034 forcible rapes, 33,734 robberies, 14,987 aggravated assaults, 88,049 burglaries, 53,728 larcenies (over \$50) and 43,746 car thefts. But Los Angeles, a bigger city, reported infinitely less crime, and that treasured old crossroads of morality, Chicago, was relatively without blemish — compared to Fun City.

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